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TITLE: The Application of the Elaboration Likelihood Model to HIV Prevention in an Adolescent Population

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BACKGROUND: There exists limited work incorporating attitude change and persuasion research with HIV prevention. This study involves the use of a model of persuasion, the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), and a model of information processing to investigate adolescent attitudes toward HIV prevention messages.

METHODS: We examined 298 eighth and ninth grade students. The Identity Style Inventory-2 assessed information processing styles. Information-oriented actively pursue new information, normative-oriented follow the norm of peers, and diffuse-oriented are defensive toward new ideas. Participants were randomly assigned to one of four audio tape message conditions, varying the message source between high (an HIV positive teen) or low (a parent concerned about AIDS) as well as the strength of the overall argument (strong or weak), while controlling for processing style. Following the message, participants completed the thought listing technique, where all thoughts regarding the message were listed and self-scored as pro-content, counter-content, or neutral. At the end of testing, involvement with the topic of HIV/AIDS was assessed through an invitation to take a pamphlet on HIV/AIDS for more information. Regression analyses assessed the effect of message quality, source credibility, issue involvement and information processing style on the variance in attitude toward HIV/AIDS.

RESULTS: Considering the regression analyses, the following hypotheses were confirmed ($p < .05$). First, the information-oriented identity style will account for significantly more attitude change toward HIV risk than the other two styles. Second, the normatively-oriented identity style will not account for a significant amount of attitude change toward HIV risk. Third, the normatively-oriented individuals will express significantly more thoughts counter the prevention message than the other two styles. Fourth, normatively-oriented participants are significantly less likely than information-oriented individuals to act on information received (i.e., less behavioral intent as measured by taking the HIV/AIDS pamphlet).

CONCLUSIONS: Research has only recently begun to utilize attitude change and persuasion models with HIV prevention. This study provides a significant first step toward a line of research incorporating the ELM in the construction of HIV prevention messages. Current HIV prevention work by the authors using the ELM with multicultural populations is also addressed.

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